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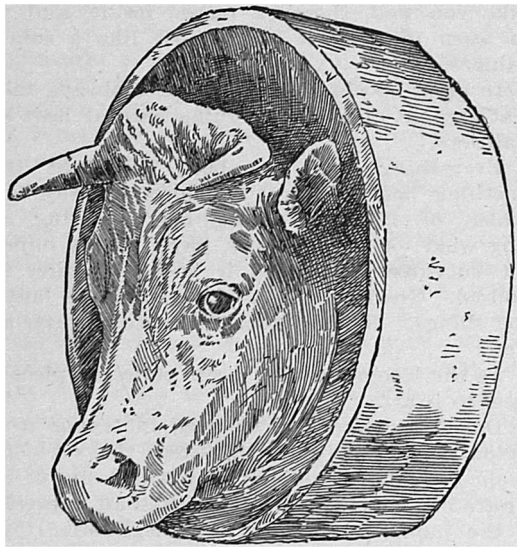
"AURORA CHASING AWAY THE NIGHT."

TERRA COTTA IN AMERICA.

BY MARY GAY HUMPHREYS.

IT is instructive to stand on the time-honored ruin of the baths of Caracalla, amid the dust of marble and stone, and pick up a brick intact bearing the stamp of the Cæsars. The new and impressive meaning of "time" one receives is superinduced by a prouder thought. All around are evidences of the destruction of nature's unassisted work. It is the triumph of man that his survives. D'Agincourt writes apropos of sculpture, that soft clay being nearest to hand, was used in the first necessity of life. In fact, the use of burnt clay ante-dates historical record. The natural inference is that primitive races kindling fire on clayey soils noticed the tenacity of the paste. That, afterward, holes thus made in the ground were used for holding water. The step is but short to the modeling of rude utensils for cooking and necessary purposes.

How early terra cotta was known, and how common was its use, may be inferred from the fact that early Assyrian and Babylonian bricks are found coated with a white vitreous glaze, and from our remote point of view, we see Luca della Robbia face to face with the builders of the Tower of Babel. How well the ancients knew the power



ALDERNEY COW FOR STABLE.

of resistance of terra cotta to all the destructive influences of time we may know from the fact that their archives, their historical records, were cast in terra cotta.

Of its early and common use among races in ornamental sculpture, Cicognara writes in his work on sculpture in Italy: "Who knows how often, and amid how many nations, may not have happened that which was related in Corinth of the potter Dibutades, of Sicyon, whose daughter traced on the wall the shadow of the face of her lover, who was about to leave her; and the outline of whose shadow, filled in with clay by her father produced the first profile in bas relief, and was baked in the furnace with the tiles."

Greece so richly abounds in marble and stone that terra cotta was not greatly used. Roman remains, however, abound in terra cotta, the clay of the country being suitable for its production. It is in Italy, and during the golden age of art, in the fifteenth century, that we find the period of its greatest use and highest artistic value. It is not pertinent here to speak of Luca della Robbia and his work, which was one important outcome of the revival of terra cotta, since we are more concerned with its architectural value.

The earlier Roman buildings were covered with

a reticulated covering of terra cotta. The Farnese palace, begun by Bramante and finished by Michael Angelo, has all its plain surfaces of brick, and these are so fine in texture and so wonderfully joined that they appear of large, solid blocks. This perfection of the material for the actual structure was carried to equal perfection in Lombardy, which is truly the country of brick. It is here that we find what can be done architecturally in brick rather than by ornament. In looking over

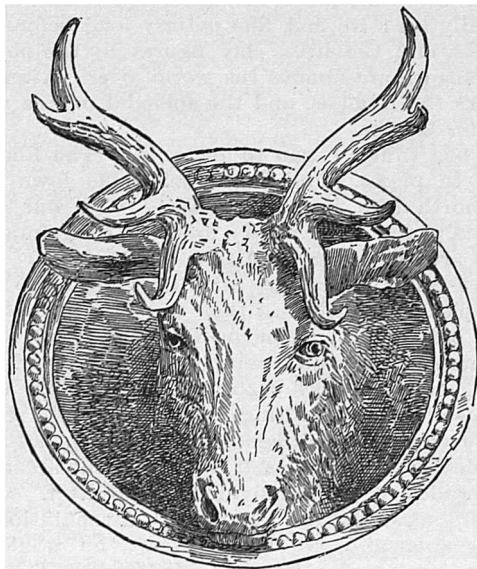


MEDALLION, "NAVIGATION."

the cathedrals, churches and campaniles of Northern Italy in terra cotta, one is impressed by all that can be accomplished in the construction simply of brick and independent of ornament.

The spire of the church at Chiavalle is one of the most graceful pieces of architecture in Lombardy. This is but a succession of brick arcades, the lower three having the effect of steps, making a base from which the more slender stories rise. In other campaniles of Northern Italy beautiful effects are given by brick columns supporting the main structure with outer balustrades and columns of marble, getting their relief from the warm color within. In others the stories are spanned by circular bands of short brick pilasters, connected with open work. An architectural feature that has never been introduced into this country, but one fruitful in effects.

The cathedral at Crema is a fine example of work accomplished in brick alone. The brick is of a bright orange color, its hue having been comparatively little altered by time. The large ornamental windows are very rich, and it is only on analysis that we discover how little this is owing to ornament. The real effect lies in the numberless moldings that frame the window, and these are all



FROM THE WASHINGTON MARKET.

of small brick, used in large numbers, and put together with consummate art. In the church of the Carmine, at Milan, the mechanical workmanship in the laying of the brick is still marvelous, the pieces being polished and cut like one large block.

In Venice one is constantly impressed by the richness of exteriors, due simply to the laying of the brick. Even the humbler dwellings and churches of Maranno are thus conspicuous. How wide-spread this technical skill extended is evidenced from the Baltic to Gibraltar. In an old peasant hut at Bonneville, dating from 1600, near Stutat, the wide fireplace backs and the chimney awake the admiration of every passer by for the effects brought out by the laying of the brick, and which, from the humble condition of the hut, we must conclude that even the humblest workman thus understood his craft.

It is too great an undertaking to consider sculptural ornament which later adorned to inevitable satiety the architecture of Italy. But something may be said of the terra cotta pilasters and cornices of that remarkable cluster of buildings known as the Certosa of Pavia, in which architects, artist and workmen, all artists, lavished their various fancies. Such details we find used in the private houses of Northern Italy. After fresco and the use of stones became common it was customary to make the window frames of terra cotta, richly carved. In many instances these were extended in beautiful little balconies of terra cotta. One of the prettiest ornaments we find are twisted moldings, and larger moldings of this sort are broken by other ornament making small columns of great beauty in the Certosa of Pavia.

One can only wonder that with such examples in view that the use of terra cotta should have been almost abandoned in Italy. It is only within a comparatively short time that it has been revived at Milan by Andrea Born, whose experiments have been of wide-spread interest. His difficulties lay in bringing the clay to the point that while sufficiently plastic, it should not be overplastic, difficulties bridged by the use of quartz and calcareous clays.

The clays, in the first place, were mixed in the proper proportions until they should be thoroughly homogeneous, then moistened, left long enough until they should thoroughly rot. The modeling was done by using small pieces at a time. The pieces were then dried in the open air, then polished and put into the kilns; burned with wood, that combustible being desired that produce the most flame.

The clays in many parts of this country have long been known as valuable for terra cotta, but it was not until a half dozen years ago that anything worthy of mention was accomplished. Since that time the impetus it has received has been very great, and the use of terra cotta in large and important quantities is found even in remoter parts of the country. This naturally is governed as yet by commercial ends, and is in keeping with the general tendencies of the country. More we could not yet expect, but the result of the vast quantities of work to be performed will inevitably attract toward it the younger sculptors returning to this country from abroad, and who do not find that field awaiting them in the fine arts that the younger painters do, and find it is to be remarked that many of them are making their way among the decorative arts.

The history of the Perth Amboy Terra Cotta Company, the largest in the country, may be taken as that of the other terra-cotta works in the United States. The village, a sleepy old town on the Kill von Kull, has taken new life since the revival of this interest. The country, within ten miles' radius, has been long known for its fine clays. Here, indeed, are all the materials for terra cotta found.



MANTEL TILE.



KEY IN ENTRANCE, MORTIMER BUILDING.



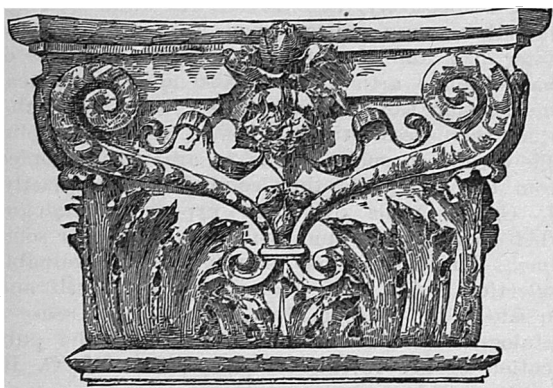
PANEL IN WASHINGTON MARKET.

The process is well known; this company, as every other, having its trade secrets as to proportions, secrets always known but never told.

The clays are thoroughly dried, pulverized, mixed until they become homogeneous, appropriately moistened and stored away in caves, where they lie until desired for the modeler's use. There is a large studio where the modeling is done: the pieces are then thoroughly dried by artificial heat, after which they return to be polished and subjected again to the sculptor's discretion, after which they are fired. For stock work, and work to be repeated, casts are taken, and the modeler's work becomes that of the molder.

The head of the studio is Mora, a Spanish sculptor, long resident in South America. He has shown himself exceedingly versatile, his work comprehending the widest variety of subjects, and thus far the work in terra cotta being imperatively governed by commercial rather than artistic ends, this versatility of the chief of the studio has proven exceedingly valuable.

The first work of any importance done was the Long Island Historical Society Building, in Brooklyn, finished May, 1880. The architecture is marked by a series of arches. In the lower row the arches are filled with groups of their bricks disposed at



CAPITAL IN NEW YORK COTTON EXCHANGE.

angles with conspicuous effect. This use of brick, which we have seen is of such value in the churches of North Italy, is almost exceptional here, where ornament supersedes almost altogether the natural resources of the brick. There are three rows of super-imposed arches, the decoration being concentrated on the second row. Here the spandrels of the arches are filled in with medallions from which project the heads of Columbus, Franklin, Gutenberg, Shakespeare, Beethoven and Michael Angelo. These are set in ornament, taken from our native products, rice, corn and tobacco.

The principal entrance is flanked by heads typical of the Norseman and the Indian, their weapons making the surrounding ornament. Above is the clock tower, with the face in terra cotta. It will be seen, from the enumeration of their details, that an effort was made to give the work a native character. The heads here were modeled by Mr. Oliver S. Warner, who in the early and difficult days in terra cotta, came to the assistance of the company.

The Produce Exchange building is the most impressive yet produced. This is true by reason of its architectural mass and extent of its ornament, aside from the quality of its work. This is among the best yet produced. In the spandrels of the upper arches are the seals of the different States as medallions amid ornament, taken from the flora of the country. In the frieze above are medallions, in high relief, of the heads of different native wild animals. On the tower are various symbolic designs, including figures.

To Mr. Mora and Mr. Kemeys the modeling of the animals is due; unfortunately, but inevitably much of the decoration is repeated, and we miss that charm of variety which beguiles the traveler from step to step around the long bands of ornament that one finds in other artistic ages.

Before the building of the Produce Exchange, the reliefs of the Metropolitan Opera House were in place. These reliefs have been made familiar to the public in various ways, and without the technical excellence of the Luca della Robbia reliefs in the Bargeno, at Florence, it is these in spirit they re-

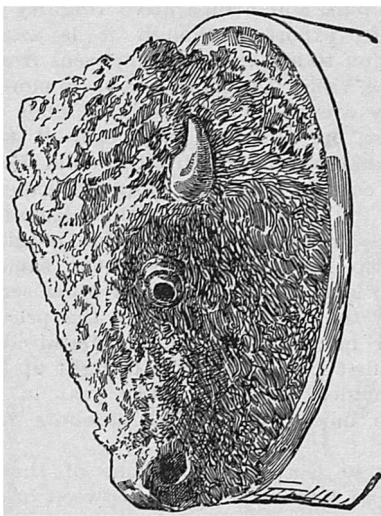
call. In some of his work, in this respect, Mr. Mora has been very successful.

In the Masonic Temple, at Trenton, is a band consisting of six figure groups, illustrating the six ages of Produce, Stone-cutting, Architecture, Writing, Printing, Discovery, and Modern Science. In each of these are three figures. The first two have breadth and a certain largeness both of design and execution. A young man with head bent forward, the third of the group in architecture, is classic in feeling. The others fall far short of this, that of Modern Science, which introduces a woman in modern furbelow listening at a telephone, has even a comic element.

It is apparent here, and in the work on the tower of the Produce Exchange, that the material of the present is not amenable in Mr. Mora's hands for artistic purposes. Some excellent work has been done in heads of animals for the stables of Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt by Mr. Mora and Mr. Kemeys. The illustration given—the head of an Alderney cow for stables of F. K. Ward, Washington, D. C., speaks for itself as to the character and the differentiation of textures.

The greatest amount of work done in terra cotta has been for trade and corporation buildings. The Broad Street Station of the Pennsylvania Railroad, at Philadelphia, is a notable instance. Some of the most elaborate work yet done is now being made for the stables of the Adams Express Company, at Cincinnati.

The illustration given, "Aurora chasing away the night," is for this building. This is a delicate



FROM THE NEW YORK PRODUCE EXCHANGE.

piece of modeling. There seems to be some uncertainty in the connection between the horses and the chariot, but the design is still lovely. The ornament of the chariot is a beautiful arrangement of seven female figures indicating the days of the week. As will be observed, there are opportunities for the widest discrimination between clouds, figures, horses, draperies, and this is carefully made.

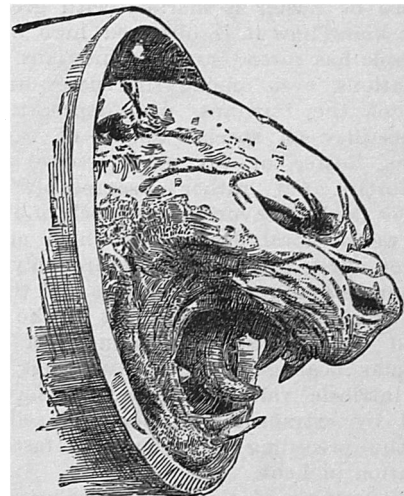
In this respect the panels made for the new Cotton Exchange must be mentioned. The ornament is taken from the cotton plant, with bursting balls, and in them the fluffiness and lightness of the cotton are cleverly rendered. Another instance of texture is in the ribbon of buff terra cotta, which ornaments the outer edge of the Lawrence building, in South Fifth avenue, in which the peculiar fold and luster of the silk admirably appears.

In these minor qualities of the work in terra cotta great progress has been made. Those higher ends which belong to terra cotta, no less than to sculpture, we can scarcely yet hope to see developed, but it is certain that great probabilities yet await the younger sculptors in work of this sort if they are led to give it attention. No other field for their art has so

rapidly developed, and in time having escaped from the control of business considerations, terra cotta will undoubtedly offer opportunities for valuable artistic work.

Another feature of the manufacture of terra cotta must be mentioned. We have seen for what valuable ends the constructive qualities of brick served to the builders of Northern Italy. With the exception of the Long Island Historical Society building the work in terra cotta is almost exclusively connected with production of ornament. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the perfection of texture, color in brick, and the laying of which characterized the fifteenth century.

However, for the house of Mr. Charles and Mr. Louis Tiffany, a special brick has been made. It is a thin, dark speckled brick, having a warm tint.



AMERICAN PANTHER, MODELED BY EDWARD KEMEYS FOR OFFICE OF PERTH AMBOY TERRA COTTA COMPANY.

The house, as it stands on Madison avenue, is conspicuous thus by its color as much as by its architecture. This brick has been found available in other ways, and recently it has been used in mantel facings with good effect in the country house of Mr. Charles F. Osborne.

In spite of the generally accepted belief that the atmosphere of the studio is enervating and inimical to robust manhood, artists are not all babies. A recently republished list of the heroes of the easel who served during the Franco-Prussian war out of Paris is interesting reading, if only to show that a good painter need not be so effeminated by his servitude to a refining profession as not to be a man too. Meissonier was an officer on the staff of the National Guard; Regnault, a soldier in the same arm of the service, was shot at Buzenval; Otto Weber was killed in the Gardes Mobiles, and Eugene Leroux, shot through both thighs, wound up his martial career in a Prussian military prison; Bougereau served on the ramparts as a home guard during the entire siege, and Vibert was severely wounded during the defence; Cuvelier, the sculptor, was shot early in the siege, Clesinger was in active service throughout the war but escaped unscathed; Blanchard, the engraver, and his artist sons, fought side by side, and Tissot, Vannier and Blaise bear scars in testimony of their manhood in the field. The list extends itself to more than double the foregoing, and is filled with names whose reputation is world wide.

SINCE the Montreal carnival, snow shoes have become popular articles of wall decoration. There are many much less picturesque objects than snow shoes used to decorate with, and applied in the right way in the right places, they can be made to serve a very picturesque purpose. A trophy composed of a pair of snow shoes, a couple of lacrosse sticks, and one of the red and blue woolen caps which have such a jaunty effect in a Canadian snow scene, would make a very striking and pictorial ornament indeed for a smoking-room wall.



PANEL IN COTTON EXCHANGE.